

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE RISEN JESUS

(Circular letter to the members of the Order, 20 March 2000)

Rome, March 20, 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have left the Nineteen hundreds behind and begun the Two thousands. This does not yet mean a change of century, only of numbers. Only when we begin the year 2001 we will be able to say we are in the twenty-first century. In any case, this is of little importance. Our way of measuring time is not the only one: there are other calendars and other cultures besides our own.

The human being is a time-bound being whose life is measured by succession: before, now and after. As *Homo viator*, we can only come to maturity by going on pilgrimage through time, letting ourselves be shaped by events while at the same time participating in them and contributing to the task of history. Yet this is not all: as Christians we affirm that time has come to a certain *fullness and completion* (Cf. Gal 4:4) by the very fact that God has entered into human history, eternity into time.

In this sense, the year 2000 has a very particular meaning for us. Exact chronological calculations aside, we are celebrating the 2000 years since the birth of Christ, a cause for special rejoicing and gladness. In order to sanctify this moment and help us to celebrate it better, the Church has summoned us to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000.

Though the Great Jubilee retains its connection with the three dimensions of time and with our hope in eternity, it also involves looking back to the most basic and permanent foundation of our life and history, and opening ourselves to it once again. In this sense, the Jubilee means orienting ourselves towards the future and at the same time opening the prison of time in order to gain free access to the one who remains forever: Jesus, died and risen for our glorification.

I would like to begin this circular letter with two conciliar texts taken from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts... That is why the Church realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history (GS 1; cf. 4).

The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny... She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever (GS 10).

These words invite us to cross the threshold of the Millennium, arm in arm with all of humanity, following the Risen Jesus, the Lord of all time. As the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, we

are aware of being in deep fellowship with the twentieth century. Since we came to birth at the same time, its pain and joy, its progress, its lapses and vicissitudes were also our own.

In two previous circular letters we have already contemplated together on the world-wide and ecclesial context and also on present-day culture, all of which served as a framework to help us understand our Cistercian identity, intimately bound up as it is with the mystical dimension of Christian life.

I now invite you to recall the past in order that we may walk securely in the present and project ourselves into the future. Let us contemplate the **twentieth century** and look behind its many people and events in order to discover the **Risen Jesus**. Let us awaken our faith in the Lord of history, the faith of yesterday, today and always, and let us work accordingly.

1. OUR TWENTIETH CENTURY

1.1 *A first look*

There was no lack of **contradictions** in the nineteenth century. It was at one and the same time a century of great massacres and of great economic development, a century of mass democracies and of totalitarian dictatorships, of globalization and of aggressive nationalism, of technology at the service of both life and death, of nuclear peace and innumerable wars.

Various key **words** were coined and often heard. Each of them characterized a complex reality in a simple way. Not everyone today will know all of them, but they are worth recalling: nation, psychoanalysis, liberalism, protectionism, socialism, communism, democracy, totalitarianism, popularism, progress, modernization, radicalism, development, secularization, atomic, genocide, peace, ecology, technology, cybernetics, bioethics, globalization... And the list could continue.

Already at the beginning of the 1960s it was being announced that: *Today, the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world* (GS 4). This statement proved to be even more true in the years that followed. It is safe to say, then, that history has never before undergone such an acceleration. Never have changes been so rapid and far-reaching. Never have the agents of change been so varied.

A few dates appear to have signaled irreversible **transitions**: The war of 1914-1918, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the economic and commercial crisis of the 1930s, the great war of 1939-1945, the decolonization of Asia (1946-1948) and Africa (1957-1967), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the conquest of the moon in 1969, the collapse of communism along with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989, the world-wide commercial "boom" of the early 1990s and the new world order following the "Gulf War" in 1991.

Relative to all that has been said, there is also need to mention certain barriers that have been overcome, the kinds of **development** or progress that years ago seemed impossible or unthinkable: the elimination of age-old diseases, interplanetary voyages, nuclear research, manipulation of human genes, nearly instantaneous communication around the globe, the rise in population, increased life-expectancy, rapidly rising literacy rates, the new megacities...

In spite all of this, we also note another characteristic of our 20th century, namely the **inequalities** of the past that have continued into our own day. The transformations just mentioned have not altered the hierarchies that were in place at the beginning of the century. The nations of North America and Western Europe are still the wealthiest, even though Japan and a few countries of Eastern Asia and

the Arab world have attained a greater level of prosperity than ever before. The inequalities that already existed are now abysmal: a rich 1/5th of the world population controls 80% of the resources, while yet another 1/5th made up of the poor has access to barely 1% of the resources. The other 3/5ths make do with 19%.

From the "gender" point of view, the inequalities are even more noticeable. Women carry out 63% of the work done in the world but possess only 1% of the cultivated land and receive only 10% of the world income. 75% of the world's poor are women, as are 70% of the world's illiterate.

Most historians and critics agree that the 20th century has been marked both by **violence** and **war** on the one hand, and by **notable progress** on the other: that is to say, the scientific progress (developments in computer science, communications and medicine), civil progress (the spread of democracy, the new social role of women, the development of international organizations) and ecological progress (care for the environment) that stand out over the last one hundred years. Our present pope, in just a few words, makes an intuitive synthesis of our century's situation: *Our times are both momentous and fascinating (Redemptor Missio 38).*

1.2. *General features*

The characteristic features that give our century a particular face and a well-defined identity are many. Most likely, if we take them together as a whole, we can come up with something concrete. Looking to the past and then centering our attention on the present, we can say that the 20th century was:

-The century of **freedom**: both because of the end of colonial imperialism in Asia and Africa, and because democratic systems, overcoming various totalitarian regimes, have gained over half of humanity.

-The century of **capitalism**: political freedom usually goes hand in hand with economic freedom. With the overthrow of the communist system, the economic structure of over half the world's societies is capitalistic.

-The century of **electronics**: if printing reduced the cost of communication and information to 1/1,000th, the transistor radio brought it down to 1/1,000,000th. The result has been a shift from the industrial era to the era of technology and computer science.

-The century of the **massive market and the market of the masses**: everything is produced in the greatest quantities possible for the greatest possible number of consumers.

-The century of **genocides**: from the dramatic genocide of the Armenians hidden beneath the euphemism "necessary military evacuation of the war zone" (1915), to the "holocaust" of the Jewish people, to more recent versions such as "ethnic cleansing," "crimes against humanity" and "forced evacuation." The numbers vary, but the brutality of the deed remains the same.

-The century of the **"new barbarians"** (from the Third World): who make peaceful invasions by emigrating to the technological-industrial countries of the First World, thus modifying the make-up of these societies and giving rise to the reactions of racist minorities.

-The century of the **unforeseen**: quite simply because so many unexpected things came about, which confirms the statement: history is given new direction by the unexpected.

We can add to this another characteristic that left its mark on the 20th century, namely that it led to a **new era of revolutions**:

- The **digital** revolution: we are moving from "*voice recognition*" to "*artificial intelligence*."
- The **biotechnical** revolution: which will end up either performing miracles or creating new monsters.
- The revolution against the **democratic system**: either in the form of tribalism (minorities that gain strength), fundamentalism (the manipulative simplification of society), totalitarianism (the rejection of individual freedom), or others.
- The revolution against the **capitalist system**: as advocated by ecology (to defend the health of the planet against the threats of "progress"), or through various forms of socialism (since a few live at the expense of many and since many are excluded from the prevalent world-order), or by radical feminism (with its more global view of the human person and its project of significantly transforming the current system of relationships).

Is it possible, then, to make a unitary interpretation of the 20th century? That is to say, is it possible to find **one feature** that in itself embodies our century's identity? Many historians have tried to meet this challenge. They would all agree that the study of history has to seek to understand events in terms of individual and collective responsibility, in terms of human motivations and consequences. It is an attempt to make a unitary synthesis of the most fundamental orientations. Contemporary historians would also agree that, with the year 2000, it is not only a century that is coming to an end, but also an historical epoch, that is, a period with a character all its own, represented perhaps by an emblematic figure or a particularly eminent personage.

There are several such synthetic interpretations of the 20th century. From a north-western point of view it might be called:

- A "**short century**": the central meaning of the century is to be found in the events that took place between the First World War and the end of the Soviet Empire.
- The century of the "**great illusion**": the illusion consisted in thinking that human history is based on an intrinsic rational necessity, leading to Bolshevik communism.
- The century of the "**end of history**": with the end of the ideological conflict and the victory of capitalism over communism, history has reached its culmination and, consequently, its end.
- The century of "**fear**": fear of war, of hunger, of robbery, of terrorism, of dictatorships...
- A century of "**civic passions**": movements of women's suffrage, human rights or colonial independence.
- A "**failed**" century: since the phantoms that haunted its beginning are still there at its end: nationalism, racism, violence, lack of respect for the human person...
- The century of "**ideological wars**": between 1914 and 1945 two bloody wars took place in Europe and around the world, while between 1945 and 1991 there were yet other conflicts on the national level in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, etc.

-The century of a "**bi-polar world**": centered on two great superpowers, the United States and Russia, with their respective spheres of influence and satellite countries.

This diversity of answers clearly shows us that it is not easy to make a single evaluation and synthesis of one hundred years of human history. Moreover, what would it look like if our point of view was the East or the South?

1.3. *The primacy of shared responsibilities.*

A half-century ago, more precisely in 1945, the liberal and capitalist democracies of England, France and the United States, together with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, overcame the totalitarian and imperialist threat of Germany, Italy and Japan. Following the war, there began the silent confrontation between Russia and the United States. At the same time, the defeated former powers were given help to reconstruct democracy and economic well-being. The new nations Asia and Africa, freed from the colonial yoke, did not create new social, political and economic alternatives, instead nearly all of them fell in line with the communist or capitalist systems. The fall of Russian communism demonstrated the **superior efficiency** of the liberal capitalist economy and greater adaptability of democratic systems.

Consequently, from the geo-political and socio-economic point of view, everything seems to indicate that the Euro-American west has come out as the winner in a century marked by so many conflicts. More precisely, we can see that the United States of North America currently exercises the **greatest influence** on the economic, social, political and cultural world order. The globalization of industrial and technological capitalism is due to its uncontested supremacy. In the "global village" of our contemporary world, North American culture so dominates languages and communications that everyone depends on it in one form or other.

Nevertheless, the Euro-American west has not been the only leading actor in the century coming to a close. **Other important influences** have played and are playing their part, perhaps increasingly so. Global capitalism is unthinkable today without the self-determination of the Latin-American, Asiatic and African countries. This has imposed a more democratic character on international exchanges. Likewise, the inclusion of players who were formerly excluded from the democratic game - such as women, workers, racial and religious minorities - has become possible, thanks to their struggles to recover their rights. Moreover, such phenomena as China's resurgence, Japan's wealth of tradition and technology, India's reserve of human and spiritual values, Africa's deep sense of identity with the land, south-east Asia's capitalism and the Islamic world's growth... remind us that the world's future is not only in the American-European west.

We are all more and more aware that the "poly-centric" world of the 21st century - even though a single superpower acts as "international policeman" - requires a **joint effort** towards peace and universal concord by means of dialogue, the recognition of the dignity of all parties, and a strengthening of international institutions. Above all, we must also recognize that universal concord can come about only by means of efforts for reconciliation and mutual forgiveness.

Let us listen to someone who has been a traveling companion for several generations during the century we are now concluding, someone who has a sense of being invested with a *universal fatherhood*, who embraces all men and women of this age, without distinction.

But one question can be asked: was this century also the century of "brotherhood"? Certainly, an unqualified answer cannot be given.. For this reason, it seems to me that the century we are beginning ought to be a century of solidarity. We know one thing today more than in the past: we

will never be happy and at peace without one another, much less if some are against others.... Never again must there be separation between people! Never again must some be opposed to others! Everyone must live together, under God's watchful eyes!... We are all responsible for all (John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 10 January, 2000).

1.4 *The Church and the OCSO*

This is not the place to show how the great political, social, economic and cultural events of the past century have affected or are affecting our own monastic Cistercian history. Nor will I attempt here to chronicle the life of the Church and the Order over the century, since this would take us beyond the scope of a letter such as this.

It does, however, seem opportune to remember that our interpretation of history cannot be just a history, be it secular or sacred. As **dwellers on the frontier** between this world and the next, we must read history as a place of grace-filled and saving encounter between God and humankind, as well as a place of the dis-graceful encounter between the City of God and the city of Satan.

We might say, then, that the **history of humanity** is not what we see and read about everyday in the newspapers and the latest reports. None of these take into account the hand of divine Providence guiding the ultimate course of events. *That the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other is a fact accessible to faith alone. It remains a mystery of human history* (GS 40). What really orients and directs the path of humankind's history is the radical search for the Kingdom of God and his justice, following the Risen One, trusting that all the rest will be given as well.

Concerning the **history of the Church**, then, there is all the more reason to affirm that the human and divine dimensions are at work simultaneously. Revealed mystery is received with faith and lived out in specific times and places. Since the Order's history is part of the Church's history, what is said of the Church also applies to the Order. The history of the Order is a humanly conditioned history and, at the same time, is caught up in the saving plan of the God of Love. There are two active forces working and cooperating in our history: the Spirit of Christ and each one of us. While it is easy to make out the footprints we ourselves have left over time and in various places, it is difficult to perceive traces of God since they elude any "when" or "where."

In the history of the Church, and of the Order as well, each **Jubilee** or anniversary is prepared by divine Providence. It is an invitation to each of us - according to each one's grace and at the appropriate time - to look over the history of the Church and the Order with the eyes of a believer, especially over the last one hundred years, in order to give thanks, to convert ourselves, to assimilate it all, and to give praise.

To give thanks and praise especially for all the **signs of hope** shining in the ecclesial sky at the end of the second millennium: the welcoming of charisms and the Church's promotion of the laity; the recognition of the role of women in the Church; the flourishing of various movements within the Church; dedication to the cause of Christian unity; openness to interreligious dialogue; dialogue with modern or contemporary culture; catholicity or universality that respects the different cultures; unconditional support for peace, justice and the dignity of human life; the emergence of the Church's "Marian profile."

To give thanks and praise also because **glimpses of resurrection** are not lacking in the Order today. These are the fruits of faithfulness to grace in the past: numerous martyrs who sealed the offering of their lives with their own blood, a body of legislative documents that are both inspiring in their spirit and clear in their norms, fidelity to the point of heroism in extreme situations, the

inculturation of the patrimony in new cultural contexts, foundations in the young churches, desire for gospel and monastic radicalism as a contribution to the new evangelization, increasing collaboration between monks and nuns at the level of authority, affective and effective openness to the Cistercian Family, the participation of lay groups in the Cistercian charism...

A contemplative look at our own history also brings to mind these words of Benedict, our patriarch: *To attribute to God, and not to self, whatever good one sees in oneself. But to recognize always that the evil is one's own doing, and to impute it to oneself* (RB 4:42-43).

2. *The Risen Jesus*

Let us now open our eyes to the *deifying light*, to that *light of life* which enlightens our steps and allows us to run forward without being caught off guard by the darkness of death (Saint Benedict, RB Prol. 9-10. 13).

Jesus Christ, *the fullness of time*, is the Lord of the ages and, perhaps even more so, of our 20th century. It is he who gives all of history its definitive meaning, transforming it into a **history of salvation**, that is to say, into a succession of divine acts and human responses in order to carry out God's plan. When God becomes man and rises from the dead, the divine breaks into human history as never before. Therefore, God-made-man and risen from the dead by power from on high:

- gives meaning to the past, of which He himself is the fulness.
- transforms the present into the acceptable time.
- gives meaning to the future by opening it to the hope that vanquishes death.

2.1. *A meta-historical event*

The witnesses of the resurrection present it as a border-line event: the things that preceded it are incarnated in history, but this history itself and what follows leaps beyond the limits of history. The Risen One is met in a state of life that surpasses the coordinates of time and space. In this sense, he is "trans-historical."

On the other hand, the witnesses of the Risen One with their testimonies about the resurrection can be placed and dated. The same can be said of the impact and consequences of this event throughout human history. The centuries-old presence of the Church is proof of it. This is the great paradox of Christian faith: though based on a meta-historical event, it has revolutionary historical consequences.

Everything would have come to an end after Calvary had not Jesus, raised up by the Father, begun to *let himself be seen, show himself, reveal himself, appear* (Lk 24:34; Acts 7:2.30; 13:39; 1 Cor 15:5-8). It is something that imposes itself from without and flies in the face of the objectively verifiable experience of his cross and death. In other words, the **initiative** is his, Jesus'. His followers, both men and women, welcome him, receive him.

Jesus, then, lets himself be seen, or is shown in a **new state** of *glory* (Acts 22:11; 2 Cor 4:6). It is an *apocalipsis* (revelation) of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12.16). The revealed glory is an anticipation of the eschatological, that is to say, of what is final and definitive.

The **experience** of meeting the Risen One is unique in its kind, having no point of comparison with other spiritual experiences. It gives rise to "knowledge," though not of a simply objective kind that remains apart from the one who has the experience. Whoever meets the Risen One is totally affected and taken over by the life of the Lord. Although it is not independent of faith, this

knowledge is not a consequence of faith. Rather, the Risen One is the foundation of our faith: *if Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile* (1 Cor 15:17).

Our **faith** in the Risen Lord is based on the testimony of the Apostles, concerning which we have no doubts. However, this is not all. Our **testimony** of the Risen Jesus, in order to be truly such, cannot be based simply on something we have heard, but must also be supported by our own "**experience**" of the Risen Lord, through the mediation of the Holy Spirit within the believing Church.

We know God by faith as if by hearsay, but through contemplative love he reveals himself to us in a kind of manifestation of his presence. He who was made known by hearsay is now found to be really present, as it were, the very one who before seemed a stranger to us, of whom we had only heard, and who had not shown us his presence (S. Gregory the Great, *Commentary on the First Book of Kings*, Sch, 391).

The Church also, at each moment in its history, *experiences Christ in itself and blossoms with the fullness of life*. It can therefore bear witness to the message of salvation with confidence and boldness (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 6).

This experience is possible only when faith accepts Christ, *seated at the Father's right, no longer in lowly guise, but in his own flesh transformed with heaven's beauty*. This faith purifies the heart and makes it possible to experience the Risen One: *with the hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of love, with the mind's eye* (S. Bernard, SC 28:10).

The community, as a fraternal communion of love in the Spirit, *is a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord* (Vita Consecrata 42; Mt 18:20). The Abbot of Clairvaux has something to say in this regard: *You are mistaken, holy Thomas, you are mistaken if you hope to see the Lord when you are apart from the company of the apostles. Truth has no love for corners; roadside lodging places do not please him. Truth stands in the open and delights in discipline, the common life, and common undertakings* (S. Bernard, Asc 6:13).

These experiences take absolutely nothing away from our life of faith. Rather, they make it possible to accept all the self-stripping and self-forgetfulness involved in living a life of faith and love. Anyone who has touched the Risen Lord with the hand of faith can state: *It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive. If he lives, I live, for my spirit acts through his. Yes, he is my life, my all in all. For what can I lack if Jesus is still alive? Rather everything else may be taken from me, nothing else matters to me so long as he lives. If he wishes then, let him take no account of me. It is enough for me that he still lives even if he only lives for himself* (Gueric, *Sermon* 33:5).

Lastly, it must be said that our experience is similar but not identical to that of the first witnesses. Our experience presupposes theirs, whereas their experience is rooted in their years of living with the Master. In any case, had we only the experiential witness of the apostles, the Risen Lord would be a figure of the past, inoperative for us in the present and could hardly give us cause for future hope.

I remember saying a few words at the close of the 1990 Chapters General concerning my "weak and strong points." Among the latter, I mentioned the following: "the ability to **bear witness** to the constant, active presence of the Risen Christ and his Mother at the heart of the Church." Can I say the same now, ten years later? Thanks to the gospel witness of our seven Brothers of Atlas, I answer with even more conviction and boldness than before: Yes! This statement is an act of faith by which my freedom and my conscience are once again converted under the influence of divine grace. It will be a credible and acceptable statement if I embody it in a docile and fruitful life in the Holy Spirit.

2.3 *An inexpressible event*

For our forebears in the faith it was not easy to find appropriate words for the new reality they experienced. Beginning with their very first account, the witnesses used a **varied vocabulary** that could be said to fall into three categories: resurrection, exaltation and vivification, as illustrated in the following texts:

-If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9).

-Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name (Phil 2:9).

-Put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit (1 Pet 3:18).

Clearly, the first witnesses communicated the event by means of **formulas** that soon became public and fundamental. These formulas arose in various contexts: preaching, catechesis, liturgy and mission. Here are two others, both very primitive, taken up by Saint Paul years later in his letters:

-For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Cor 15:3-5).

-Descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 1:3-5).

There then followed the composition of the **Easter narratives** we find in the Gospels, which refer to the empty tomb, the witness of the women (absent in the early accounts or kerygma), and the apparitions of the Risen Lord (with differences of time, place, recipients and reactions). These accounts are an apologetic complement to the kerygma (the bodiliness of the resurrection).

Finally, we have the **kerygmatic discourses** of Peter and Paul included in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2;3;4;10 and 13). Luke's elaborations aside, these speeches reflect a primitive kernel (the presence of semitisms) belonging to the accounts given to the early community. They contain three typical elements: the contrast between the failure of the Jewish leaders and the efficacious action of God in raising Jesus; the transformation of the disciples, thanks to the apparitions, into witnesses of the wonderful eschatological events with which God has brought about salvation; the testimony of Scripture as a confirmation of God's action.

Though formulated in a variety of ways, these texts communicate to us a **single message** of vital importance, on which our Christian faith is founded:

-Jesus appeared to certain disciples after his death.

-He was announced as risen from the dead.

-He who is Risen is the same as He who was Crucified, even though he is no longer the same.

-His physical body is now a spiritual and glorified body.

And it is not only our faith that is founded on this truth. Our monastic life, as a life of faith, would lack Christian identity and would be absolutely devoid of meaning without Jesus Christ glorified. Our monastic life is a *progressive resurrection* in the Risen Christ (Cf. Gueric, *Sermon 35:5*).

2.4 *An event full of meaning*

All of the New Testament writings are a "rereading" of the fact of the resurrection and of the reality of the Risen Lord. This means that the resurrection and the Risen Lord are in themselves a synthesis

of all reality. This basic kernel of the Christian fact and the Christian message is of unfathomable wealth. Let us try to enter into this mystery and seek its meaning.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, considered in a **global** way, might be understood as the irruption of what is eschatological (i.e. ultimate, unsurpassable, definitive) into our human history. In other words, the Spirit irrupts into mortal flesh, and life totally absorbs death. It is the definitive revolution in cosmic, human and historical evolution.

From the point of view of **the Father and the Holy Spirit**, though it perhaps seems bold, we might say that the virginally fertile Fatherhood of God reaches its fulness in a way unforeseeable on the human plain, in the resurrection of the only-begotten Son. It is the supreme work of creation and spiritualization: whereas the first creation sprang from nothing, the second springs from death! The resurrection reveals the self-giving love of the Father and of the Spirit in response to a life given, even to the point of total emptying on the cross. The prophecy of the Psalms thus finds its completion: he did not allow his Holy One to experience corruption, he did not abandon him to Hades, he showed him the path of life, the fullness of joy in his presence.

For **Jesus**, the resurrection is above all his total rehabilitation after having been condemned in a shameful way. It is the luminous "Yes" of God as opposed to the dark "no" of human beings. For this very reason, it is the irrefutable testimony that Jesus is the ultimate, final Prophet of God. By suffering abandonment and putting himself in God's hands, Jesus ran a risk that could only end well. For this he is truly blessed and his blessings are true. Sin and death, which Jesus took into his own flesh, were thus dethroned and vanquished once and for all. Jesus experienced the resurrection as:

- Transformation** into a spiritual body and a life-giving spirit (1Cor 15:44-45).
- Re-creation** as a new man, new father of humanity and firstborn from among the dead (Rom 5:7; 1Cor 15:20ff).
- Total **incarnation**, for the fullness of divinity dwells in him bodily (Col 2:9).
- Gift** of the Spirit that makes him in turn a Giver of the Spirit (Jn 20:22).
- Newness** and "rebirth" in his divine sonship (Rom 1:3-4).
- Receiving** the Name which is above every name (Phil 2:9).

From the moment of his resurrection, Jesus can identify himself totally with the persecuted and the little ones. He is also enabled to take on a sacramental presence through the species of bread and wine to be eaten and drunk by believers. In a word, the Risen Lord is the *Fullness of him who fills all in all* (Eph 1:23).

The **apostles**, for their part, experienced the resurrection as the transformation of Jesus the Nazarean into Jesus Christ the Lord, and as their own transformation from mere disciples to witnesses of the Risen Lord. They thus understood that God was already in the Crucified One, whose face, because of the resurrection, will show forth the divine glory. The Gospels say nothing about apparitions of the Risen Lord to his **Mother**. Perhaps this is so that her happiness will find completion in believing without seeing (Jn 20:29), and so that she can be even more pleasing to God (Heb 11:6). In any case, as a mother, the resurrection of her son affected her to her very depths. From that very moment she began to experience her glorious assumption in the image of the firstborn from among the dead.

If the Risen Lord sustains and enlivens our faith, his resurrection fully explains **our life in Him**. Indeed, the resurrection is at the very origin of the Church and of our faith. Through baptism in his Passover and by receiving his Spirit, we have been transformed into the Body of the Risen Christ. The resurrection is the reason for our hope and the pledge of our future resurrection, assuring us that

our work and our efforts for the Kingdom are not in vain. It allows us to recite the Our Father with faith, asking for the hallowing of his Name and the coming of his Kingdom, that is, the resurrection at the end of time. And what is to prevent us from thinking that women have been given a special privilege and title as the first witnesses of the Risen Lord? Be that as it may, both they and we are well aware that to believe in the *Kyrios* means to follow the Crucified Lord, but with the power and grace of the Risen Lord. Thanks to the Risen Lord, we live without fearing death and die without losing life.

Brothers and Sisters, at the beginning of this letter I invited you to contemplate the 20th century, and to discover the Risen Lord at the heart of it. Time is inhabited by Him who is Lord of history. Therefore, our **hope** does not perish and each moment of this life is a seed of eternity. Everything that still has to happen until the end of the world will be an unfolding and an explanation of what happened on the day of the resurrection. On that day, the body of the Crucified Lord was transformed by the power of the Spirit and in turn became a source of that same Spirit for all of humanity.

Sunday is the day on which the Risen Lord becomes present from among the dead. For this same reason, Sunday is the day that reveals the meaning of time: springing from the resurrection, it traverses human time, the months, years and centuries, as a spear, steering them toward the second coming of Christ. Sunday prefigures the final day, the day of the Parousia, already anticipated in the resurrection. Amen, *Marana tha*, come, Lord Jesus! Yes, come quickly!

With a fraternal embrace in Mary of Saint Joseph,

Bernardo Olivera
Abbot General